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# The Job of Executive Officers in Senior Citizens Clubs

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Ministry of  
Culture and  
Recreation

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Division

Hon. Robert Welch  
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Deputy Minister



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# You're Elected !

No active member of any organization need hesitate to accept a position as an officer of their club. This applies to senior citizens' clubs just as much as to any other group organized to meet the needs of those people attracted to it.

All that is required is a personal commitment to the aims of the association, a genuine interest and concern for the fellow members as individuals, plus a general basic understanding of some common sense methods and procedures by which things get done well. It is to the latter need that this booklet is directed.

If you have just taken office you may be wondering what this new job involves -- what it will mean to you and to the club. If you have been involved for some time but are now assuming a new position, perhaps you are looking for new ideas for the further development of the club. Or perhaps your club seems to have drifted into doldrums and is in need of a lift.

Whether the club is newly formed, or is already well established, the first thing is to think about why your club exists, and what the members want from it. What is the purpose of the club?

# Purpose

Most senior citizens' clubs are organized because a group of older people find they need opportunities to meet other people of their own age. Usually new members are attracted to the club initially seeking this opportunity.

When a sense of sharing and belonging has been realized through the new friendships and interests developed in the club, the members begin to recognize other unsatisfied needs and desires as well. There are activities for the group to participate in, and new experiences to plan and enjoy together. Many members will find they want to do things for others in their community. All the members will be happier for knowing that their club is considered worthwhile by others.

Whatever special purpose a group of senior citizens may develop, the underlying function of nearly every club seems to be to make life a little more stimulating for the members.

## Let's Look at the Members

Unless the leaders can come to know each member individually, they cannot be sure

that the activities offered in the club program are satisfying the needs of these members. Many will enjoy a particular activity, but that is not enough to assume that all the members want that activity all the time. Perhaps we should reflect on the club's purpose and see whether it is in line with what the members think and feel.

Let's look at our club members as well, and see how we can help them to carry out the purpose of the club.

There are usually some who tend to sit to one side, apart from the group's activity. Certainly it isn't wise to push quiet, reserved people into the planned activities, even though we realize there is therapy in group work -- a therapy we all need at times.

The solution usually lies in approaching them each week until their interests finally are revealed. Then that special interest may be used to bring them into a full relationship with the group. They will feel secure and ready to mingle and make friends.

The trouble in your club may not be with the shy members, but rather with the aggressive people who want to tell everyone else what to do. Even one such person can disrupt the club if no solution is found to deal adequately with the matter. Psychologists tell us that their difficulty is the same as that of the too-quiet person -- fear. That is, the fear we know as insecurity. Fear that no one really wants them, that they are not needed, leads to an aggressive approach to others.

Bossy people are out to prove that they are needed--trying as desperately to prove it to themselves as to the group members.

Try to find for such people a real job in the club where they are not involved with too many people whom they might upset. Give praise whenever they do work that is praiseworthy. You will be surprised to find them gradually losing some of that aggressiveness as they feel secure and wanted.

These are two problems of special interests and personalities that we see frequently when we look at the members as individuals. Either problem can be turned into an opportunity to improve and develop the club if care is taken to channel their potential effectively. We find many, many examples of once-timid members whose talents come to light and who emerge as valuable contributors to club life. We also benefit from the development of the aggressive people who were once disruptive but who become accepted, genuine leaders in various phases of the club's activity.

There are still other problems demanding our attention when we look at the club as a whole.

## **What Should Our Club Be Doing?**

Do all the members understand the group's purpose, and work and play together as a team? As a group, other than helping individual members, what are you trying to

accomplish? What are the strong points of this club, and what are its weaknesses?

Is the program of recreation planned so that it will add to the health of the members?

Members of the medical profession who have made studies of old age suggest that older people must keep moderately active, both mentally and physically. If, for instance, your club did nothing but play euchre, you would be missing a great opportunity to help members retain good health. A program including shuffleboard, or some of the many active games requiring little or no equipment, gives members the physical exercise they need. And there are many other games to stimulate the mental faculties, and these can be used to stir up the thought process as well.

Here are two of the ways in which you can make members feel needed.

Club work should be divided amongst committees, so that as many different members as possible are serving. Whenever a special project requires a committee to undertake the responsibility, members other than those already active should be recruited to assist in useful and meaningful ways. Too often, and we know it is the easy way to get things done quickly, the same people serve on all committees. Working on challenging assignments is one way of involving members in teamwork, and is a way of helping them feel useful and needed.

If the group has been meeting only for recreation, would the addition of some other goal give it new life? A desire to help may also be channeled into service in the community in which you all live.

Older people must have continuing opportunities to remain involved in the life of their community. These contacts not only enhance community life, but maintaining an active interest in some phase of community service is important to the individuals who continue to give of their time and talents. The members can participate in local charity drives, do volunteer work, or assist organizations that are active in children's work. The public library will welcome assistance for programs that they would like to offer, such as story times for children. Similar programs will provide a needed service in low-rental housing neighborhoods. All volunteer agencies working in the community need assistance of this kind, particularly during daytime hours. The involvement may take the form of service to neighborhood groups, or in a variety of public concerns. There may be a need to seek support for improved Sunday public transportation, or to promote and seek sponsorship of pre-retirement education programs. Discussing this possibility at a meeting of your members will reveal many examples, unique to your community, which can be explored.

Carrying out such a club program not only benefits its own members. The example of an active and interested group of older people creates in the community new attitudes toward old age and a new appreciation as to the contribution of its senior citizens to the vitality of the community.

Only when you have surveyed the members of your club, as well as the purpose and the program offered, is it time to look at yourself as officer or leader.

# Leadership in a Group

The most successful leaders are warm, sensitive, outgoing people who have learned to handle others in a democratic way. They do not order people around or do everything for them so that they become dependent. The leader should try to encourage the silent members to speak up. He or she should be an accepting person who respects the individual.

Audrey R. and Harleigh B. Trecker (Dean of the School of Social Work, University of Connecticut) speak of "seven central ideas about leadership" in their book Committee Common Sense. They say that LEADERSHIP

- is a helping or enabling process,
- is shared responsibility,
- is a relationship between people,
- depends on the situation,
- is co-ordination of effort,
- is fulfilment of purpose,
- is a process of meeting human needs.

Let's look at these seven ideas one by one.

1. The best group leader works WITH the members and helps each one to carry out his individual responsibility toward the group's

purpose. Such leaders find satisfaction in the group's accomplishment and the progress of the members, rather than in ordering people about.

2. Many members of clubs and committees are capable of doing part of the job of leadership from time to time. The group will have more vitality if everyone takes his or her share of the responsibility and does not leave everything to the chairman or president and a few others.

3. The leader who works WITH people tries to understand his or her relationship to each member, and all the interactions that exist between members in the group. This understanding is the basis of his or her leadership.

4. When leadership is shared by all the members, the person best qualified to help the group do a particular job can be assigned the role of leader.

5. Effective leaders have the special skill of fitting the effort of each member into a co-ordinated whole.

6. It is the leader's job to keep the purpose clearly before the group, whether it is a committee learning the best way to do "friendly visiting", or an executive group drawing up a program outline for the whole year.

7. All those who work in groups have two kinds of satisfaction -- a shared sense of accomplishment when the group makes progress with its task, and also the personal feeling of significance that comes from carrying out a role in the group.

# The Committees

After the leaders are elected, they might at their first meeting, based on the various needs of the club as a whole, set up those committees required to look after the various aspects of the club. Of course, only those committees actually contributing to life in your particular club will be established, and these should have a written description of their responsibility for the guidance of those serving on them. Some of the usual committees are

program  
refreshment  
maintenance  
publicity

welcoming  
library  
visiting

The program committee needs to be composed of people with ideas and ability to approach others about participation. A few clubs change their program committee each month. In other clubs each group is appointed for a year. There is something to be said for each method. Changing every month encourages each succeeding committee to try to outdo the preceding ones. Naming a committee to act for the whole year gives the committee an opportunity

to check with the members as to what type of program best suits the majority, and allows for more careful planning and the introduction of greater variety.

The welcoming committee should be composed of friendly people who stand at the door to welcome all the members, and particularly newcomers. A couple of members of this committee should be assigned to seeing that new members are introduced to the president and to their neighbors when they have taken their places.

A library committee is a group of members in charge of distributing magazines and books under a carefully planned system. Records should be kept of what members have borrowed which books. Many of the members will be glad to contribute books and magazines to the club so that other members may enjoy them. Sometimes people in the community will pass on books and periodicals to the club. The committee may arrange for small groups to discuss worthwhile books. Discussion groups will likely meet at one another's homes between regular club meetings.

The visiting committee needs to be carefully selected for the type of personality that will be helpful to the sick or shut-in member. The Ontario Red Cross Society has a good training course on friendly visiting, and supplies excellent manuals. The visiting committee would do well to inquire about the course.

The refreshment committee undertakes the responsibility for the advance planning for refreshments and the handling of the refreshments at the group meeting as well. It is therefore one of these committees which de-

mands the attention of its members during times when they probably will be forced to miss a part of the meeting. When the members are busy in the kitchen they are, at least temporarily, left out of activities. For this reason, committee members should not be required to serve for too long a period. They should be relieved frequently during meeting-time-hours, and the leaders should get into the habit of calling on others to help.

A maintenance committee undertakes the responsibility for a variety of tasks necessary to accommodate the group at their meeting. After consulting with the program committee they should plan to prepare the meeting place in readiness for the program. They should be on hand early to help arrange the chairs and tables, and other setting up that may be necessary. Two or three of the members should plan to stay at the end of the program to tidy up the room and leave it as it was found. The committee may also have to attend to a tired lamp or broken chair from time to time. Another valuable contribution may be to inventory club supplies and equipment, and to recommend replacements or additions for the consideration of the club.

This committee, like the refreshment committee, can become burdened with detail work and miss out on the enjoyment of parts of the program, so the leaders should ensure that there is a constant volunteering of assistance from the group in general. At least the members should secure and use the manuals. They are available through your local branch of the Red Cross Society.

The publicity committee needs two types of people -- those who know or can contact public officials, and those who can write a good

report for the papers. The publicity committee should also be ready to explore the possibilities of TV and radio. This committee has the important job of being the liaison between the club and the public and, therefore, can do a great deal to help the public understand that added years do not necessarily mean lost wits.

Special committees may be assigned to jobs that are outside the scope of the standing committees. Occasionally some special event must be planned -- a variety show or bazaar perhaps. A special committee, and even several sub-committees, may be needed. This gives the executive the opportunity to involve new members who have not been assigned to a committee. They can be asked to look after special tasks -- selling tickets, pricing articles, making costumes, and so on.

## Formal Structure

Whether a club should formally elect officers will depend on whether the group expresses the desire to do so, and on the possibility of training leaders from within the club. As the purpose of a senior group is not usually to carry on a great deal of business, formal structure is not always necessary. Small groups can usually assume responsibility for their own program, and what little business they do can be taken care of informally.

Formal structure may hinder rather than help them. One of the problems that can arise from formal structure, particularly when a group is not ready for it, is the development of a clique that decides everything for the group without actually getting the opinions of the members.

However, formal structure for some groups may be helpful for business meetings, and it may be noted that modern applications of parliamentary procedure make for less rigid formal meetings and allow for a good deal of discussion.

## The Officers

The most important thing when a group is newly formed is that the members become acquainted with each other and feel relaxed in the group. If after some time the members feel the business part of their meetings would go more smoothly if they used formal procedures, here is an outline of the usual officers and their duties. Elections may be held annually or semi-annually.

President

Vice-president (perhaps 1st, 2nd, 3rd)

Corresponding secretary (some clubs may also need an assistant corresponding secretary)

Recording secretary (perhaps also an assistant recording secretary)

Treasurer (and assistant treasurer if one is needed)

Committee chairmen (the chairmen of standing and special committees are usually part of the executive)

The president is the officer responsible for the conduct of business meetings or the business session of a gathering. His or her job is to see that the club's business is conducted efficiently and that everyone present understands the questions raised. The president

- calls the meeting to order; then presents and secures agreement on the agenda.
- keeps to the agreed order of business.
- should avoid taking part in the discussion or expressing his or her own opinion. (The president does not vote unless to break a tie.)
- should see that each member who wishes to speak is given the opportunity to do so.
- should see that each motion has a seconder, or that it is dropped. (A motion without a seconder must not be put to a vote.)
- should state the wording of the motion clearly and allow for adequate discussion before taking a vote.
- should announce the result when a vote has been called for (carried or defeated).

The first vice-president assumes all the above responsibilities in the absence of the president. The first vice-president is usually considered in training to take over the presidency when

necessary. Additional vice-presidents may be assigned special duties such as assisting the president, coordinating the work of committees, and so on.

The corresponding secretary is in charge of all the correspondence of the organization. At each meeting he or she should be ready to report letters received since the last meeting and to read any of importance to the club.

The recording secretary takes the minutes of each meeting. The minute book should give a concise account of what was done. It should include reports of committees, and record any recommendations made. The minute book is the property of the organization and should be kept available for inspection by any member at any time.

The treasurer should handle all the money of the organization, keep an account of membership fees, and an account of all receipts and disbursements in a proper book. The treasurer should submit a statement at each meeting. The books should be audited semi-annually.

## Order of Business

The order or agenda for business meetings is sometimes set out if the club has adopted a

constitution. A club may use any order of business that seems convenient, appropriate, and efficient, provided all the members present have agreed to it. Here is the form it usually takes

1. The president (or committee chairman) calls the meeting to order.
2. The roll call by the secretary. If the meeting is large this item can be taken care of by passing the membership book for signing, or having it at the door.
3. The minutes should be read by the recording secretary and approved by the members, or the president may ask if the members wish the minutes read. If not, a member should move, and another member second, a motion that the minutes be taken as read.
4. Correspondence should be read by the corresponding secretary. Letters requiring action should be handed to the president; any others may be filed without motion.
5. Business arising out of the minutes.
6. Unfinished business.
7. New business (including a notice of motion if needed.)
8. Announcements.
9. Adjournment.

# Meetings

A formally organized club should hold regular business meetings. Their frequency will depend on the needs of the club. Members should be notified of the meeting and the agenda to be used at least one week in advance of the meeting. About one-third of the members usually constitute a quorum, a requirement which will be spelled out if the club has a constitution.

There should be an annual or semi-annual meeting of the organization for the election of officers and for a review of the organization's operations and plans.

# Nominating Committee

A nominating committee of about five members may be chosen by the members themselves at least a month before the meeting for the election of officers. A nominating committee prepares a slate of names, one or more for each office. Every effort must be taken to

ensure that prospective nominees are solicited from the full membership. The use of a nominating committee is often found to be the best way of ensuring a well-chosen list of nominees.

After the nominating committee has read its report the president should ask for further nominations from the members. Care must be taken that the members are given their democratic right to nominate any qualified person they choose.

## The Constitution

For a social club a constitution may not be a necessity. A few rules of procedure will cover the need.

If a constitution is drafted, its articles usually set out

1. The name of the organization
2. The purpose of the organization
3. Who are eligible for membership
4. Membership fees
5. What officers are to be elected
6. Duties of officers
7. Meetings - regular and annual
8. Elections and the nominating committee
9. Order of business
10. Amendments

Many club constitutions may be amended by a majority vote at any meeting of the organiza-

tion, provided that the proposed amendment has been given to the membership at least one month before it is formally presented and they are asked to vote on the question.

## Activities

Clubs that regularly seek entertainment from outside their membership are missing a great deal. A well-planned entertainment by good artists is excellent as a variation, but those who think members want to sit passively and be entertained just don't understand people very well.

Groups that do nothing but play cards are missing the boat. Cards are good fun, and an occasional meeting should be a card party. Or the first hour of a club gathering might be devoted to cards to satisfy the wishes of the card-loving members. But not all members enjoy card games, and if only card players seem to attend meetings it may mean they have driven away those who would like to do other things.

Some clubs go in for games that seem childish to the serious type of person, and he may turn away in disappointment.

A program committee's first task is to find out what all the members like to do. One of the best ways of doing that is to plan a series of meetings at which the members can try many

different kinds of activities. Then the members may be asked to check off on a list their first, second and third choices. When results have been tabulated the program committee can claim to know what the majority of the club members likes best.

From the minority interests, small sub-groups can be formed to meet at times other than the regular club meetings to carry on those activities they most enjoy. In addition to enjoying whatever activities are going on at regular meetings, they will meet to share their special interest at another time.

For example, a group of members may be interested in sketching and painting, or in sharing their enthusiasm for collecting coins or stamps. Eventually they will be able to help their club with an exhibition or display, and the members will be rightly proud of them.

A good program will stimulate the interest of the members, in their own well-being, in others, and in the community. In planning an afternoon or evening meeting the committee should ensure a balanced program, one that will include a physical activity and a quieter period. There should be something to engage the mind as well as the body, and there should be an opportunity to mix with the whole club as well as a chance to talk with a special friend.

The program as a whole should include

Looking - at films, entertainment, demonstrations, displays, exhibits

Doing - craft, projects, games, singing, dancing

Going - on bus trips, to local industries,

gardens, picnics, autumn-color tours, excursions, sightseeing trips

**Giving** - contributing to the community in time, skill, energy and experience.

## What about Games?

There are many excellent sources of information and assistance available for planning a wealth of suitable games. Local libraries will have books on games, and the staff will assist by recommending publications on hand or from other sources. If there is a municipal recreation department serving the community this will be a good source of information and possibly assistance as well. Agencies such as the local Y will have help available or be able to refer you to alternate sources. Inquiries directed to the Special Services Branch will be referred to the appropriate staff who will render assistance and advice.

Many games can be played sitting down if need be (avoid games that require too much stooping). Most games are helpful in getting shy members to participate in group activity. The members should be given opportunities to decide on the type of activity they desire, as well as to introduce games which they

particularly enjoy. Below is a summary of activities that might be carried on in your club.

- Quiet games      Intellectual games, paper-and-pencil games, table games, checkers, card games
- Active games      Dance games, musical games, contest-for-places dramatic games, racing games, horseshoes, lawn or alley bowling, darts, carpet bowls, quoits, shuffleboard
- Craft activity      Clay, plaster, wood, leather, painting and drawing, sewing and knitting, coppercraft, jewellery making, mosaics, millinery, crocheting
- Excursions      Museums and historical sites  
Concerts  
Parks, lakes, sightseeing  
Industrial plants
- Educational      Lectures and discussions  
Book reviews, music and drama appreciation  
Travelogue films and illustrated talks  
Social and community action
- Special projects      Outside entertainment  
Home talent  
Community services, visits to shut-ins

Camping and holiday outings  
Annual exhibitions, bazaars,  
etc.

## You As an Officer

Your confidence can be increased, and proficiency enhanced, in a number of ways. You may feel the need for further training or knowledge in the area of leadership. Or you may see the value in presenting such opportunities to a greater number of the members of your own club in order to develop and mobilize still-hidden talents of many present members. This development assistance is readily available in a number of forms, and there should be no hesitancy in exploring the possibilities.

Numerous publications exist which provide a wealth of information. Short or long term courses are offered, and weekend or one-day seminars and workshops are available. This learning experience may be in some education or training centre, or in your own club. It may be for your own membership, or held in co-operation with other clubs. Competent trainers skilled in leadership development and group organization are available to assist you.

All these will develop the capabilities of your leaders and members, and increase the potential for internal and external service of your club. None is over-taxing or beyond the capacity, in time or energy, of any active member of your group. Reference to the Special Services Branch will result in full details for your consideration.

No matter what main purpose and goals your club may have, it will remain a lively organization just as long as each member gains some personal satisfactions through belonging to the group. That means each member committed to the purpose, understanding and identifying with what the group is trying to do, and finding something meaningful in the program that meets his or her own interests and abilities.

As a leader you can contribute most to this end by helping the members to

- feel secure in their friendships with each other
- have adventures through the club
- know that they are recognized for their own abilities
- gain response and appreciation from other members.







